

THE
DIGNITY and AUTHORITY
OF THE
Christian Priesthood,
ASSERTED; in a
S E R M O N
P R E A C H E D at
ORMOND CHAPEL,
December 10, 1710.

By *SIMON OCKLET*, B. D.



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L O N D O N:

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THE
PREFACE.

I was induc'd to publish this Sermon by the Perswasions of several Persons of Understanding and Integrity, both Clergy and others, who conceiv'd it might be of some Service to the Church. The Case is this; There are a great many well dispos'd Persons, who desire to serve God sincerely; who think if they do but hear the Gospel Preach'd, it is no great matter by whom: And upon this Account frequently withdraw themselves from communicating with those Pastors whom God hath set over them. I have endeavour'd in this Discourse to shew, that this is not a Matter of

The Preface.

So small Importance, or of such an indifferent Nature as they do falsely imagine. I have drawn up what I thought most material upon this Subject, into as narrow a Compass, and in as clear a Method as I was able. If it shall be of use to strengthen any that are wavering, or bring back any that have already wandered out of the Way, I have my End. God grant that our sincere Endeavours may be answer'd with Success. Amen.

Simon Ockley.

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*The Dignity and Authority of the
Christian Priesthood.*

MALACHI ^{2.} ~~III.~~ 7.

*For the Priests Lips should keep Knowledge;
and they should seek the Law at his Mouth,
for he is the Messenger of the Lord of
Hosts.*

THAT God has taken Care to provide sufficient Means for the Instruction of his People in all things necessary to their Salvation, is doubted by none that believe Reveal'd Religion: But what these Means are, and how they are to be apply'd, has been, and still is frequently controverted. For tho' all agree that the Holy Scriptures were written by Divine Inspiration, and left for our Instruction; yet after what manner they are to be understood, and to whose Care the Interpretation of them is committed, affords matter of Dispute. Some assert a Necessity of immediate Inspiration, without which they affirm it to be altogether as impossible to reach the true Sense and Meaning of Writings divinely inspir'd, as it is for an irrational Creature to pass a Judgment upon the Actions of a Rational Man. Others content themselves with believing the Truths contain'd in the Holy Scriptures,

tures, and proposing to walk in some measure answerable to the Rules there deliver'd, without looking upon themselves as oblig'd to the Observation of any external Ordinances, or being join'd to the rest of their Brethren in any Church Communion. Another sort are not satisfy'd with any thing less than a constant Succession of Ministers, to whose Care the interpreting and dispensing the Will of God to the People is committed, and who derive their Authority and Commission by the Mediation of those Persons, who had it immediately from God himself.

That the last of these Opinions is the only true one, I shall endeavour to make appear from these Words of the Prophet; and in order to it, I shall consider,

- I. The Office of the Priesthood, and to whom it belongs.
- II. The Duty of the People, with respect to the Priests.

I. Before the Law was deliver'd by *Moses*, the whole Race of Mankind was under that Covenant which God made with *Noah*; during which Interval, the antient Practice of Sacrificing was never intermitted; nor can we suppose, that every Man perform'd this Part of Religious Worship for himself, but that there were Priests for that Office. In *Abraham's* time we find *Melchizedeck*, King of *Salem*, the Priest of the most high God: For this reason a proper Person to be a Type of that Great High Priest, our blessed Saviour, because he was the first that executed that Sacred Office in that holy City since the Creation, and the last till the *Aaronical* Priesthood was establish'd in the Land of *Canaan*. Without Predecessor, without Successor. But besides this, the Antiquity of the Priesthood is evident from the Idolatry spread over the Face of the whole Earth. The antient
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Heathens not only preserving the Notion of an over-ruling Power, and the Worship due to him, but having Persons always set apart for the Administration of sacred Offices. And tho' they were dispers'd at never so great a Distance: Tho' the Names and Statutes of their suppos'd Deities, and the manner of worshipping them was never so different, yet they all unanimously concurr'd in the paying due Reverence to the Priesthood; the Universality of which Practice is a plain Evidence they deriv'd it from the times of *Noah*.

This is a Proof that this Order was at first instituted by God himself, and when he came to set apart his chosen People *Israel*, he singled out the Tribe of *Levi* for his own particular Service, and out of that Tribe *Aaron* and his Posterity were advanc'd to the Dignity of the Sacerdotal Office. Which is the true Meaning of these Words of the Prophet a little before my Text, *That my Covenant might be with Levi*. Not that it can be suppos'd that *Levi* in his own Person did ever execute any Priestly Office. During his Father's Life, it was without question perform'd by him, which was a constant Practice in those Days, for the most honourable Person of any Family or Country to be employ'd in that most honourable Office. And if *Levi*, or any of his Posterity had been to perform Religious Rites during the *Egyptian* Slavery, in all Probability we should have met with something relating to it in *Jacob's* dying Speech. Besides, the formal manner of setting *Aaron* and his Sons apart, express'd *Exodus* xxviii, xxix. plainly shews that it was altogether new: To which we may add, that the Rigour of the *Egyptian* Slavery was such, that it was impossible for them duly to attend upon any Religious Exercise. Circumcision indeed they retain'd, and some few other things, by which they kept themselves distinct from other People, ever since the Call of *Abraham*.

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The Dignity and Authority of

But when it pleas'd God to reveal his Will to his People by his Prophet *Moses*: When he deliver'd that Dispensation by which they were to be govern'd till the Times of the promis'd *Messias*; the Office of Priesthood was so distinctly separated; that none but a Rebellious *Korah* could call it in question. It pleas'd God so to honour the Priest, and the greatest Favours he bestow'd upon his People pass'd through his Hands. 'Twas his Business to pray for them, to bless them, to offer up their Sacrifices, to determine in Cases of the nearest Concernment. He only wore the *Urim* and *Thummim*, he only was admitted into the Holy of Holies. In a word, he was the particular Favourite of Heaven, and whatsoever Affront was offer'd to him, was resented by the Divine Majesty as done to it self. O

To enlarge upon a Subject so well known and understood would be tedious, especially considering that the Dispensation of which I am now speaking is antiquated, and consequently of no other use than so far as it may give light to the better Understanding of that, which by the Grace of God we live under. Wherefore 'tis necessary in the next place to consider the Christian Priesthood, and to whom it belongs. Now there is no Controversy since the Reformation has been more warmly debated than this. *Calvin* affirms, that since the Coming of our blessed Saviour, there neither is nor can be any Priesthood; he being the only High Priest, who once for all offer'd up himself as a Propitiatory Sacrifice for the Sins of Mankind: Which is cavilling about a Word to no purpose. For tho' 'tis true, that it was the Priest's Office to sacrifice, yet that was not all his Office. And if it be true that that Part of his Office is abolish'd, does it follow from thence that the Priesthood is also abolish'd? That still may, and does, and must remain, so long as there is a God to be worshipp'd by rational Creatures living in a State of

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of Probation. For whoever understood the Word *Priest* in any other Sense than as denoting a Person set a-part by Divine Appointment for the Administration of Sacred Offices, be it in what Dispensation soever God has pleas'd to put us under? And that there were such Persons set apart by Christ himself, is past all Contradiction.

The Apostle's Title to this is controverted by none; but whom it belongs to at present is frequently disputed. Now there is an absolute Necessity of being secure as to this Point. For either a Man must know who is his Priest, with whom he must communicate, and from whose Hands he is to receive the Sacraments, those Pledges of our Saviour's Love, and Means of conveying those Graces to us, purchas'd by his meritorious Death and Passion: or else he must be left to himself, a Christian at large, contented with reading the Scriptures, and putting his own Interpretation upon them; which to suppose is wild Enthusiasm. Now we cannot imagine, but that the infinitely wise God, who in all his Dispensations has made his Will so plain to the Understandings of those for whom it was design'd as a Rule, has left us destitute of sufficient Means to instruct us in this particular. For the Care of God over his Church cannot possibly be less under the Christian Dispensation than under the Jewish; and consequently, to whom the Power of the Keys does belong, who are to administer the Sacraments, who, to instruct and bless the People, who, to put Ecclesiastical Discipline in Execution, must be as well known now as then; otherwise we make the Church of Christ a confus'd Multitude, without any Discipline, and the God of Peace and Order, the Author of Anarchy and Confusion. But tho' turbulent and vexatious Spirits will raise a great many unnecessary Scruples and Objections, yet the thing to any unprejudic'd Persons is very clear. For we find the Apostles commission'd by Christ

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* Epist.
ad Tim. &
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himself: we find these same Apostles * ordaining Bishops, and investing them with full Power and Authority over those Churches which were committed to their Care, both for the instructing them in their Duty, and censuring Offenders. To whom then should this Power of Right belong rather than to those, to whom it was committed by the Apostles, who, no doubt, were *faithful Servants in God's House*, and dispos'd of nothing which they were not empower'd by their great Lord and Master to dispose of? To the Bishops therefore, the Successors of the Apostles, regularly ordain'd, does the Christian Priesthood belong. This Order and Institution the whole Christian Church has been in the actual Possession of ever since the Apostles Times, and those who pretend to a better Title ought to make it appear.

But there is a froward Generation of Men in the World, who love to call aloud for things which they know are not to be had; and are always asking for an express Command of our Saviour for such an Institution. They appeal, they say, *to the Law and to the Testimony*, and nothing will satisfy them but a positive Text. But let them shew that ever our Blessed Saviour design'd to give us a Plan or Form of Church Government: which not appearing, it is no wonder if he never did, what they themselves must confess he never intended. Now to say that he did not take sufficient Care for the well-governing his Church, were the Height of Impiety; wherefore we may rest assur'd, that what should afterwards be done or taught, or instituted by the Holy Apostles, was no less intended for our Direction, than what was taught by our Blessed Saviour himself, all Divine Inspiration being given for our Instruction. And if so, the Attempt of those who endeavour to diminish the Dignity of the Sacred Order, by the frivolous Distinction of *Apostolick and Divine Right*, will be to little purpose; since that will be found

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to be Divine which is done by Men Divinely inspir'd. And tho' the Apostle did once tell us that he spoke of himself, and not by Divine Inspiration, yet we cannot suppose that in such a weighty Matter as settling the Discipline of the Church, he should be destitute of the Assistance of the Holy Spirit. But if after all, we should grant that the Sacred Order was only of Apostolick Institution, yet even that is of much greater Authority than any other can lay claim to.

Now, notwithstanding this Christian Priesthood can never be forfeited nor alienated from the Successors of the Apostles, yet there never have been wanting Men of unquiet Dispositions, who, thinking it a Grievance and a Burden to live peaceably under any Institution, either Divine or Human, or to obey any thing but what their own Imaginations shall suggest, endeavour to find out other Ways of advancing themselves and others to the Priesthood. It always was, and certainly it ought to be, look'd upon as an honourable Office; and ambitious Minds cannot endure to see others in any Station that reflects any greater Honour and Veneration upon the Persons that are in it than they enjoy themselves. *Hinc ille Lacrymæ.* These Men always have an overweening Conceit of their own Abilities, and love to see nothing above them. Had *Korah* and *Abiram* been in the Places of *Moses* and *Aaron*, they would never have found Fault with either the Civil or Ecclesiastical Constitution of the Government; but perceiving those two exalted to a higher degree of Dignity than themselves, they could no longer bear it, but cry out immediately, *Numb. xvi. 3. Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the Congregation is holy, and the Lord is among them, wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the Congregation of the Lord?* The same refractory disobedient Temper has occasion'd great Disturbances in the Church in several Ages, and has always been attended with fatal Consequences. We

have always had some, who out of an Affectation of Novelty, have been for undermining ancient Foundations, and inverting the Order which God has establish'd in his Church: And since they cannot deny but that there is an absolute and indispensable Necessity that there should be a Ministry of some sort or other continued in the Church; they are resolv'd to have it any other Way rather than that which has been establish'd, and constantly practis'd. Wherefore it will not be amiss to consider two or three of those Ways which have been found out to supply the Church with Ministers, by those Men who are willing to hear of any thing rather than Episcopal Ordination, deriv'd by Succession from the Apostles.

The first of these Ways is by the Voice of the People, or Consent of the Congregation. But this is such a precarious and groundless Way, that it seems rather to have been found out by some Person whose Interest it was to ingratiate himself with the People, and to rise by their Means, than to have been a Primitive Institution. For not to mention the Absurdity of making the People, who are to be taught, Judges of the Qualifications and Abilities of their Teachers, it neither was nor cou'd be so at first. The Apostles, as they were not, so neither cou'd they be chosen to their Office by the People, but had it immediately from Christ. The Bishops, *Timothy*, *Titus*, *Archippus*, and the rest, were ordain'd by the Apostles, but not one Word mention'd of the People, but all seems to be transacted and done by the sole Authority of the Apostles. The Peoples chusing the Deacons, *Acts* vi. 3. does not come up to the Case; for the Apostles not being at leisure to attend the Care of the Poor, were oblig'd to have fit Persons set apart for that inferiour Office; which Persons, if they were nominated by the People, who were best acquainted with them, and most likely to know them, yet nevertheless the *χειροτονία*, the ordaining them, and

and setting them apart for that Office, remain'd still in the Hands of the Apostles. And if the Ordination of the Deacons, by the laying on of the Hands of the Apostles was necessary, notwithstanding the Nomination of the People; how much less shall we suppose the People to be concern'd in the Ordination of their Bishop; the Dignity of whose Office is so much superiour, and the Weight of which requires such Endowments as they could by no means be suppos'd to be Judges of. As for the Peoples being present at the Ordination; the Governours of the Church have always had that Regard for them, as to have that solemn Ordinance perform'd in the Presence of a full Congregation; both that they might be Witnesses of such and such Persons being call'd to that sacred Function, and for the Time to come, receive and reverence them as the Ministers of Christ: As also that if they had any thing to object they might propose it to the Bishop before the Ordination. Other Power than this, with relation to the Priesthood, they never had in the Church of Christ.

But we are told by some, that tho' an Ordination by Succession is the more regular Way, and the only Way indeed where it may conveniently be had; yet if it should please God that a Number of Christian People should be plac'd in some remote Part of the World, where they could have no such Ministers; in such a Case of Necessity they might chuse from among them some Persons most fitly qualified, and constitute them Priests. This Opinion is receiv'd by a great many; upon how just Ground I come now to examine. Now'tis most certain that there can be no Necessity of breaking any of God's Commands; and his Will is that no Man take *this Office of himself, but he that is called* 1 Sam. 13. *of God, as was Aaron.* And we ought to take Care, lest while we plead Necessity, we be found guilty of breaking the Commands of God. *Saul thought himself under a Necessity of Sacrificing, being tir'd with*

with the Delay of the Prophet; but that Act of wilful Obedience was interpreted by the Divine Majesty as the highest Act of Rebellion, and cost
 2 Sam. 6. him his Kingdom. We find unhappy *Uzzah* smitten
 7. down dead upon the Spot, only because he officiously put forth his Hand to stay the Ark from being shaken. And *Uzziah*, tho' a King, the Lord's
 2 Chr. 16. Anointed, smitten with Leprosie, for presuming to invade the Priests Office, and offer Incense. How cautious therefore ought Men to be how they approach sacred Things with unhallow'd Hands? Were it not much better, in the Case just now propos'd, to trust to the Mercy of God, who is no hard Master, nor requires any more of his People than they are able to perform, than under a Pretence of supplying our Necessities, to break in upon his Divine Institution? Let us consider his own People, the Jews. Where do we find any of them presuming to offer Sacrifice out of the Land of *Canaan*, under pretence of Necessity? If it be said, that the Reason of that was, because that part of their Worship was restrain'd to the Temple; we answer, so is the Administration of Sacraments reserv'd for the Priesthood: and better it were for those whom God's afflicting Providence has depriv'd of those Blessings convey'd by the Hands of his Ministers in his Church, to rely humbly upon him in the sincere Practice of what was in their Power, till he should be pleas'd graciously to release them, and afford them those desir'd Helps, than to provoke his Displeasure by substituting in the Room of God's Minister a Person of their own sitting up.

Besides, a Person so set apart could not be a Priest, nor could any Succession of Ages help the Matter one Jot: For from whom must the first of these derive his Authority? From the People, who have it not themselves? And then, for his Part, if he should ordain to endless Generations, he could communicate no more than he had himself;

self; that is just nothing at all. And call him by what Name you please; dignify him and distinguish him after what manner soever; you can never make him God's Minister in his Church, any more than he that acts the Part of a King upon the Stage is really so. Let his Miên, his Gesture, his Habit, and every thing about him, be never so like, yet still the Authority is wanting. The same it is in the other Case. Such a Priest has no Credentials to show. He cannot talk of the *Gift that is in him, given him by Prophecy, with the laying on of the Hands of the Presbytery*. Pretend to an immediate Call, he dare not; to a mediate one, he cannot. Wherefore, with what Countenance such a Person dare presume to dispense the Word and Sacraments, censure Offenders, absolve Penitents, or exercise Authoritatively any part of the Ministerial Office, I cannot understand.

Thus much briefly concerning the Power of the People in constituting a Priest or Minister of holy Ordinances in the Church of God. But there are another sort of People to be consider'd, who take the Liberty very freely to tell us, that we need not trouble our selves about the Right of the Priesthood, because it is invested in the Civil Magistrate, to whom only it belongs to appoint who shall minister in that Church, which he is pleas'd to tolerate or establish in his Dominions: That a Person appointed by him for that Function, needs no other Qualification as Essential to the Execution of his Sacerdotal Office, but is a Priest to all Intents and Purposes. But whosoever he was that first advanc'd this Notion among us, he ought not to esteem himself upon the Discovery. *Jeroboam* found out the Secret long before, and made Experiment of it. That *Jeroboam*, to whose eternal Infamy it is recorded, that he made *Israel* to sin. That *Jeroboam*, who not content with that part of the Kingdom which revolted to him, would
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not forbear adding Sacrilege to his Rebellion, by consecrating Idolatrous Priests of his own, and withdrawing the People from their due Attendance upon the Worship of God, celebrated by his anointed Priests in his holy Temple. But to let this pass, which way will it be ever made appear, that the setting a-part of Priests belongs to the Magistrate? Certainly from the Beginning it was not so. Not under the *Jewish* Dispensation, for their Priesthood was limited by God himself to the Lineal Succession of the Posterity of *Aaron*: Not under the Christian, because that, as we have already shown, belong'd to the Apostles and their Successors. There is none I suppose will be guilty of so great an Absurdity, as to say that the chusing of Priests or Ministers did any way belong to the Roman Emperors before they were Christians: The afflicted Church in those miserable times liv'd as an entire Body by it self, altogether distinct from the Civil, and govern'd by its own Laws. Let them then shew, how the Emperor's becoming Christian alter'd the State of Affairs, as to this Particular. We know that the Face of things was quite chang'd. Those unhappy Christians, who formerly were forc'd to seek Caves and Desarts, wherein to exercise the Practice of their persecuted Religion, were graciously receiv'd: Not only protected and countenanc'd, but admitted into Places of Trust, and distinguish'd by the highest Marks of their Sovereigns Favour. And it was but reasonable, that in Acknowledgment of such Obligations, they should make such suitable Returns, as might justly be expected from Persons, who, from the most abject desperate Condition, had been advanc'd by pious Princes to Safety and Honour. But nevertheless let the Benefits bestow'd on the one Hand, and receiv'd on the other, be never so considerable, and had the Persons oblig'd been never so willing to express their Gratitude; yet was it not in the Power, either of the
Church

Church to give, or the Prince to receive that Authority which was lodg'd alone in the Apostles and their Successors. For the Prince to assume it by his own Power, had been Sacrilege, and the Bishops have no other way of conveying it, but that only, by which they receiv'd it themselves, namely, Ordination, by the Imposition of the Hands of Persons duly authoriz'd. And tho' we justly reverence the Supream Magistrate as a nursing Parent of the Church; yet those things which are distinct in their own Nature must remain so, and there will still be the same Difference that there always was, between the Ecclesiastical Power and the Civil.

Wherefore, to insist no longer upon this Particular, there is still another way behind; the only one, if we may credit the Inventors of it, by which the Church can be supply'd with Ministers; and that is to receive those only for such, who are seal'd and set apart by the Holy Ghost; who are gifted and gracious Men endu'd with Ministerial Abilities from on high. They tell us that we must no longer insist upon Succession, or any such way, whereby a Person becomes a Minister of Man's making: For tho' these things pass'd in the times of Ignorance, during the Infancy of the Church, under the Dispensation of the Law, which was Carnal and Typical, yet now, since the Coming of our Saviour, *Old things are pass'd away, behold all things are become new*, and that our Saviour has *blotted out the Hand-writing of Ordinances that was against us*. They tell us that the Apostle says in the First Chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, *I certify you, Brethren, that the Gospel which was preach'd of me, is not after Man; for I neither receiv'd it of Man, neither was I taught but by the Revelation of Jesus Christ*. This they require at the Hands of those, who exercise that sacred Office in the Church, and since they cannot be guilty of so great Impiety as to claim it, these others arrogate

it to themselves, branding the true Apostolick Ministers with the scandalous Titles of carnal Formalists, Will-worshippers, and the like; at the same time deluding the Simple with specious Pretences of seeming Holiness, and drawing those unlearn'd and unstable ones, who are toss'd about with every Wind of Doctrine, into a blind, implicit Reliance upon their suppos'd Illumination; who when they have once heartily imbib'd an Opinion of the Gifts of their new-fangled Teacher, receive all that comes from him as the Oracles of God. If he does but speak, (whether Sense or not, is not much matter) they hear with as much Reverence and Attention, as if it was the Voice of an Angel. If he be noisy and clamorous, that goes for preaching with Power and the Demonstration of the Spirit. There's nothing that he does, but carries with it a peculiar Emphasis; and what would justly be accounted a Hesitation or Blunder in another, passes with his Auditory for groaning in the Spirit. But let these Persons, who take to themselves such Liberty in the Church of Christ, as to assume an Office, to which they were never call'd, produce their Commission. Let us know which way they will make it appear, that they are thus singled out by the Spirit of God. Miracles they don't pretend to, which were the usual Means by which Persons divinely inspir'd, and sent by Almighty God to perform any extraordinary Service, us'd to confirm their Mission. Extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit must certainly produce some extraordinary Effects. In these Men we find nothing extraordinary but Ignorance and Assurance. And whilst the several contending Sects of these wild Enthusiasts lay claim to the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, exclusive of all others, whose Ministry they utterly reject; they make it evident that they are all destitute of them. The Integrity and Strictness of their Lives, were it as great as is pretended, would not be a sufficient

Proof

Proof of their being authoriz'd by God to execute the Ministerial Office in the Church; for tho' these are to be requir'd in all that shall be admitted to that sacred Office, yet no such Qualifications, or any other, how great and eminent soever, confer Authority. Abilities do indeed prepare a Man for his Admission into any Office, but they do not enable him to execute it, till he shall receive Authority from those in whose Power it is to grant it. Now it is only in the Power of our blessed Saviour to appoint what Ministers he will have in his Church. This he does either *mediately*, or *immediately*. Mediate, by the Hands of such Persons he has call'd to that high Station: Immediately, by calling and sending them after a supernatural and extraordinary manner; which that he ever did since the Apostles times, never was, never will be prov'd.

I have hitherto endeavour'd to show in as narrow a Compass as the Copiousness of the Subject would permit, to whom the Christian Priesthood belongs. I have shewn that whatsoever Claims are made, whether in favour of the Congregation, the Civil Magistrate, or Persons pretending to an immediate Commission from the Holy Ghost, in opposition to those who derive their Succession from the Apostles, to want sufficient Proof. I shall now pass on to the second Branch of my Discourse, and shew,

II. The Duty of the People, with respect to the Priests. *They should learn the Law from his Mouth, for he is the Messenger of the Lord of Hosts.*

Now I am very well aware what Disadvantages we labour under when we insist upon this Head. Because, we being the Persons concern'd, whensoever we speak of the Reverence due to the Priesthood, we are look'd upon as intersted in the Matter; and to speak not so much, because we regard the Glory of God, or the Welfare of the People, as because we are desirous of magnifying

The Dignity and Authority of

our Office, and deriving all imaginable Honour and Respect upon our selves. And this is a Handle which the Disturbers of the Church's Peace have always been very ready to lay hold of, in order the more easily to weaken the Esteem and Reputation of the Priesthood. So little Children, when their Parents teach them to honour and obey their Father and Mother, imagine that it is not done so much out of regard to their Good, as that they may domineer over them and keep them under. But in this matter we appeal to the Holy Scriptures, by which both they and we must be judg'd at the last Day. Let these determine whether we assume more than is there allow'd us. In the Words of my Text the Priest is call'd the *Messenger of the Lord of Hosts*. And our blessed Saviour saith, *He that receiveth you receiveth me*, and of those that refuse to hear those Persons that are sent by him, he says, *That it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment, than for them*. Again, *He that despiseth you despiseth me, and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me*. St. Paul speaking of these spiritual Guides, says, *Obey them that have the Rule over you*. From which and a great many other like Passages, it is evident, that the Priesthood is not an Usurpation upon the rest of Mankind, as some would persuade the World, but a sacred Office instituted by God for their Benefit and Welfare. Upon which account, how ought all Christian People heartily and devoutly to give Thanks to God for this his inestimable Mercy! That he is graciously pleas'd still to continue to them the Means of Salvation, by preserving a Succession of Men, whose only Business it is to spend their Lives in labouring for their eternal Happiness. In other Cases Men value the Means according as they do more or less contribute to the obtaining the End. In like manner, those that look upon God as their chief Happiness, ought to regard his Messengers as the principal

cial Instruments, by which they attain the Knowledge of his Will, without which 'tis impossible to please him. 'Tis they by whose Labours the Scriptures are preserv'd, interpreted and explain'd: They, whose Business it is to instruct the Ignorant; to implore God's Blessing upon his People, and deprecate his Judgments; to receive all that are admitted into the Church by Baptism. To exclude by Excommunication. To reprove the Stubborn and Disobedient, to strengthen the Weak; to administer Comfort and Consolation to the Penitent and Afflicted. To rouse and awaken the Idle and Carnal, to encourage the Diligent, to solve the Doubts and Scruples of disturb'd Consciences. Wherefore let no Man lightly esteem this sacred Office; let none be so bold as to think that he is at his Liberty, to chuse whether he will attend upon the Priesthood or not; lest if he refuse to make use of those Means which God has appointed, he should as a just Punishment of his Disobedience *be given up to strong Delusions to believe a Lye.* Let not any Man flatter himself with the Thoughts of not having offended God, because he is not immediately overtaken by some visible Judgment, and made an Example of the Divine Displeasure. As the Rewards under the Law were a great many of them temporal, so were the Punishments. We live under another Dispensation, in which the Punishments we fear, and the Rewards we expect, are spiritual. How frequent Instances of spiritual Punishment do we find inflicted upon those who contemn God's Ministers! Some of them on the one Hand running into Atheism, Deism, and all manner of Prophaneness and Debauchery: Others on the other side, amusing themselves with the Freaks of Enthusiasm, and taking the wild Conceits of distemper'd Brains for Inspiration. Look but back into the Times of our late unhappy Rebellion. No sooner was the Orthodox Apostolick Clergy remov'd, but there im-

immediately flow'd in a Torrent of monstrous Sects, maintaining such extravagant horrid Opinions as were never heard of before. Their Tenets were so blasphemous, so contrary to the Sense of Scripture, the Attributes of God, and even to common Sense and Reason, that they seem'd to come rather from Persons possess'd than sober Christians. This one would think might make Men wary, how they depart or separate from that Ministry, which God has establish'd in his Church. 'Tis not a Man's pretending, that he does not see the Reason of this or that will serve the Turn. Men ought to be modest in such Cases, and rather suspect their own Judgment than disturb the Church's Peace. To see the Reason of every thing, and rightly examine upon what Bottom it stands, requires greater Abilities, a more docile Temper, and stronger Application, than most of those who make the greatest Noise about these things, are Masters of. They seem to quarrel for Quarrelling's sake; and 'tis the Nature of their Distemper, to prefer any of their own Imaginations, how groundless soever, to the antient Practice of the Church. So Persons of a bad Habit of Body value any unfavoury Trash, whilst they cannot relish wholesome Food. Sometimes they are finding fault with the Discipline, sometimes with the Conduct of particular Ministers; at all times with something. Still making Pretences for the withdrawing themselves from that Subordination to the Priesthood in which God has plac'd them. But were things as bad as they pretend, this does not excuse them. *The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses's Seat* (says our Saviour, *Matt. xxiii. 2.*) *all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do.* They, tho' not sincere and conscientious in the Performance of their Office, had the Interpretation and Execution of the Law committed to their Care, and were upon that Score to be heard by the People. Besides, we never find that

that any of the antient Prophets in the most corrupt times, did endeavour to separate the People from Communion with the Priests, or hinder them from learning the Law at their Mouths, from whence it is evident, that there is nothing that can be pretended, excuses any Man from duly attending upon, and obeying those Persons, who are regularly set over them in Spiritual Affairs.

But a great many are afraid, lest the acknowledging any Superior in Spirituals, should argue their want of Ability, wherefore they are willing, rather than *seek the Law at the Priest's Mouth*, to stand upon their own Legs, see with their own Eyes, and judge for themselves. Most certainly there is all the Reason in the World, that a Man should be acquainted with the Nature of that Being he is to worship, and upon what account; as likewise with every other part of his Duty. We don't desire a bigotted People, who should entirely rely upon us, and take our bare Word for every thing, without seeing the Reason of it. That Arbitrary Proceeding suits better with the Tyranny of the Romish Church, which keeps the Scriptures lock'd up in a strange Language, and suffers the People to know nothing, but just what, and after what manner the Priest pleases. Our Church on the contrary has furnish'd her Children with the best Translation of the Scriptures that is extant. We preach no Doctrine but what will stand the Test; and 'tis our most earnest Desire, that all the People committed to our Charge may thoroughly understand, and sincerely practice their Duty; that we may see the blessed Fruits of our Labours in the daily increase of true Piety and Holiness. And would the busy part of Mankind attend to these things, instead of meddling with knotted Controversies and things above their reach, they would find infinitely more Advantage in reading the Scriptures. There we find Materials for Instruction, for Reproof; in short, something adapted

adapted to every Estate and Condition of Life. There we have before our Eyes the Faith of *Abraham*, the Meekness of *Moses*, the Integrity of *David*, the Patience of *Job*. The Infinite Mercy and Loving-kindness of God towards those that put their Trust in him, and the Severity of his Indignation reveal'd against the Impenitent and Disobedient. There we have the best Rules for the behaving our selves prudently and holily, and for the due Performance of all relative Duties. Above all, there we have the Love of God manifested to us by the sending of his dear Son, our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon him our Sins, and suffer for our Iniquities. In the Meditation of these things let Christian People exercise themselves; this is the way to everlasting Happiness. And tho' these things are plain and level to all Mens Understanding, yet the Attendance upon God's Minister and holy Ordinances is so far from being a Hindrance to them in their Progress, that they will find, whatsoever their Endeavours be, they will prove fruitless without it. But by this means they will find their Desires to heavenly things will be increas'd, their Love to the World abated, their Understandings enlighten'd, and their Judgments confirm'd. Their waiting upon God in his own way will bring down a Blessing upon their Undertakings, and afterwards procure to them a never-fading Reward. Which that we may all obtain, let us conclude with that excellent Collect of our Church. Almighty God, who hast builded thy Congregation upon the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the Head Corner-Stone; grant us so to be join'd together in Unity of Spirit by their Doctrine, that we may be made an Holy Temple, acceptable unto thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

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